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ABSTRACT

Policy for elementary and secondary education in the 1980's should maintain the "local control, state leadership, federal concern" triad of responsibility. Though the states are beginning to take the responsibility of ensuring equal education, an attractive federal incentive is still needed. Aid should be made on an incentive, rather than categorical, basis. Government efforts should be focused in four areas: (1) more research and wider dissemination of the results; (2) improved teacher training; (3) technology; and (4) a renewed commitment to civil rights. (SAS)

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ONE VIEWPOINT ON THE NEEDS OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION FOR THE 1980's

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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The governance of public education in America was once characterized by former U.S. Commissioner of Education Harold Howe II as "local control, state leadership, federal concern". Policy for elementary and secondary education in the 1980's should maintain this triad of responsibility, with a dose of adrenalin in the "leadership" and "concern" portions.

Absent dramatic improvements in the national economy, it is likely that Congressional debates concerning elementary and secondary education in the 1980's will be over whether increments or decrements of dollars should be voted for existing federal education laws enacted in the 1960's and 1970's. If this proves true, education will be at a disadvantage in these debates because of declining enrollments, fewer educational consumers of voting age, and competing demands from an aging population concerned with its pocketbook, security and health.

Within such a setting, the time may be right to recast the federal largesse for education (really only 8% of the total cost). For reasons that were sound for the 1960's and 1970's, the federal investment in

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elementary and secondary education has been targeted to special populations, special services and special needs. While education still has a distance to go in achieving equality of educational opportunity for all the nation's young citizens, important progress has been made. Where commitment to equality of educational opportunity once had to be primed and prodded from Washington, increasingly it is being demonstrated in state legislation, state court decisions and state executive actions. The federal "concern" of the last two decades has grown to be a key element in the state "leadership" and local "control" of the present, at least in many parts of the country.*

Evidence of this shared commitment can be seen in the nature and scope of school finance reform in recent years. More than two dozen states have significantly modified their state education aid systems to achieve greater equalization. While some states, my own included, have a ways to go before true equalization is achieved, the trend is clear and state courts are providing an effective "check and balance" to assure appropriate political action for the future.

It is this trend which can provide a new focus for federal education aid in the 1980's and beyond. An attractive incentive is needed to speed greater equalization of state aid to education. Even after intrastate equalization is achieved, differences in wealth among states will leave

*Lest this sounds too much like state parochialism, I advocate for the future continued, strong federal monitoring and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, which I have and continue to support by action as well as in principle.

profound interstate disparities. I propose that the federal investment in elementary and secondary education gradually shift from large categorical aid to large incentive aid for intrastate and interstate equalization. States should not qualify for this aid until they have demonstrated state effort and state commitment, not only to equalization, but to the goals which underly present federal categorical aid (disadvantaged, handicapped, bilingual, vocational, etc.).

Such a shift might require a dual-track policy. States could become eligible for incentive aid, or continue indefinitely (or for a defined period) to receive categorical aid. This would permit a more individualized approach to the states based both on their needs and their actions.*

Such a refocus of federal education aid would have advantages in a period of demographic change. It would appeal to all voters because it would affect their school taxes. It would complement changes taking place at the state level due to court decisions or legislative action, and thereby enhance greater coordination of federal and state aid. It would reduce growing tensions over federal regulations and paperwork burdens. It could strengthen local-state-federal governance of education in a manner consistent with time-honored traditions, while promoting the national goal of equality in educational opportunity. And, finally, it could provide a positive

*In Massachusetts, for instance, the state education aid formula gives extra funding on an equalizing basis for vocational, special, bilingual and compensatory education. These amounts, plus desegregation aid, greatly exceed the amounts provided by parallel federal programs.

avenue for the new Department of Education to phase out of the administration of a growing proliferation of categorical programs - - - each compartmentalized, underfunded, and promoting special rather than common interests within the educational community at a time when greater unity is essential.

This redirection of federal aid to elementary and secondary education would also permit a redefinition of the federal role in elementary and secondary education for the 1980's and beyond. In addition to incentive aid for equalization, I propose four other major areas of federal involvement in the decade ahead.

Research. The task of research in education is one which individual states and localities are unable to perform effectively or efficiently. New knowledge of learning and teaching requires basic and directed research with national support and coordination. The National Institute of Education has begun this task after a difficult genesis. Its role must be nourished and expanded if our shared goals for elementary and secondary education are ever to be fulfilled. Only the federal government can sustain such an effort. Research (and accompanying evaluation) should continue to be a fundamental part of the federal role in education.

Training of Educational Personnel. The national enrollment decline is a force which will have a profound impact on those who staff most of the 16,000 school districts of the country during the 1980's. The teaching force will grow older, displacement of experienced professionals will increase,

the spector of decline will unnerve and preoccupy school personnel - - - all of this at a time when public expectations and societal needs are demanding more from our schools!

The federal government can't do much about enrollments. But it can provide stimulation for schools in the form of new training support for educational personnel. The training suggested here is not the circuit-rider entrepreneur of the 1960's, but training which is locally-shaped and locally-directed at local educational problems. Some of the elements in the present teacher center statute could be the framework for such training support (though it should not be limited to teachers alone). The key ingredient is that training should not be directed to school personnel; it should be directed by school personnel.

Within the broader need for training support for those on-the-job in our schools, are two additional specific training needs. First, in states like Massachusetts "reductions in force" already have exhausted the ranks of non-tenured personnel. Future reductions will be among tenured personnel. These personnel will be at higher salary levels and the chances are slim of their being hired by other districts in such fiscally tight times. Displacement too often will mean exclusion from the profession one prepared for and has been committed to for a period of years. In Massachusetts, we are piloting short-term, cross-training institutes for displaced teachers in cooperation with our high technology industry and the state teachers associa-

tion. Federal support for such cross-training institutes could address the human problem these teachers face, can respond to employment needs of certain industries interested in recruiting mature, college-educated professionals, and can reduce the economic costs to the nation, states, and to the individuals affected by this displacement.

A second targeted training need is to attract a small core of gifted young people to teaching. Even with the enrollment decline, there will be some need for new entrants to the teaching ranks in certain localities. Superintendents of schools seeking new teachers already are reporting a marked drop-off in the quality of candidates available. The law of supply and demand is at work. The most able students who might wish to be teachers are turning to fields with more promising employment prospects. It would be in the national interest to identify and encourage limited numbers of able people to prepare for a teaching career through what might be called a program of Horace Mann Scholars, similar to the Fullbright and Rhodes Scholarship Programs. Unchecked, present trends in the quality of aspiring teachers will leave a legacy which will affect many children for decades to come.

Technology. The combination of enrollment decline, fiscal limitations, and technological advances creates a need in the 1980's for education to gain maximum instructional benefit from the so-called "new technology". The sophistication, diversity, economy and effectiveness of

this new technology (video discs, calculators, computers, integrated information systems, etc.) clearly have implications and promise for elementary and secondary education.

We need to learn, however, from the experiences of the 1960's with federal funding of computer assisted instruction, teaching machines, and instructional television. Much greater support needs to be given to the quality of instructional programming for technology, the "software". Much greater effort must be given to training and assisting teachers in the use of technological aids. Much greater attention should be directed to the curriculum and scheduling needs of individual schools and classrooms. The new technology makes it possible to avoid difficult and costly mistakes of the past, but it does not guarantee good judgment. This is left to the policymakers.

Civil Rights. Progress made in educational civil rights has been one of the most significant federal contributions to public education over the past two decades. Blacks, other minorities, those who are limited English speaking, females, the poor, and the handicapped have benefited from federal laws, judicial decisions and executive actions. Their rights transcend state lines and must continue to be a focus of strong federal monitoring and enforcement. While, hopefully, state and local officials will make federal intervention increasingly unnecessary, the stakes involved are so great for individual citizens that a continued federal role in educational civil rights is essential for the 1980's.

I have not attempted to propose in this paper a total picture of the federal role in elementary and secondary education. Nor have I dwelt upon the needs for stronger leadership at the state and local levels. Instead, I have attempted to limit my suggestions to those areas I believe are worthy of consideration by the Sub-committee on Elementary, Secondary and Vocational Education as it fulfills its important responsibilities to shape and reshape federal education policy for the 1980's.

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